(b) what is the nature of these items;

(c) what criteria have been adopted in selection of these items;

(d) what will be the duty-structure in respect of these items;

(e) how this removal of import restrictions is likely to effect the farmers and indigenous producers; and

(f) what steps are contemplated to project their interests?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN) : (a) to (f) In view of India's international commitments, import restrictions on 714 items were removed on 31-03-2000. Out of these 714 items, 230 are agricultural items 47 are textile items and 437 are other industrial products. These items are part of 2714 items, notified to WTO in 1997, restrictions on which were being maintained on account of balance of payment reasons. The identification of 510 items was made in consultation with the concerned administrative departments of Government of India. The restrictions on other 204 items were removed in terms of our Agreements with European Union, Switzerland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan signed in 1997.

Imports of most of these items attract the peak Customs duty rate of 35%. The details of duty structure are available in the Finance Bill, 2000-2001, presented before the Parliament.

All imports in the country are subject to applicable rates of customs duties and also subjects to domestic laws, rules, orders, regulations, technicals pecifications and environmental safety norms as applicable on domestically produced goods. This should provide adequate protection to the domestic industry.

The imports are being closely monitored and government would strive to ensure through appropriate use of tariff mechanism that imports do not cause any serious detriment or injury to the domestic industry.

Trade Deficit

4411. SHRI ABANI ROY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleasded to state:

(a) whether India's trade deficit for the last financial year has widened;

(b) if so, the reasons and factors responsible for the same; and

(c) the details of the new initiatives taken to promote exports to reduce trade deficit during the current financial year?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) As per the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics provisional data for the year 1999-2000, India's trade deficit has been to the tune of US $ 8616 million, which is higher than the corresponding provisional figure for the same period last year?

(b) and (c) Low growth in exports has been partly due to international factors and also due to infrastructural constraints and other impediments like narrow basket of exportable goods and low unit value realization. A number of steps have been taken to enhance the export growth which include reduction in transaction cost through decentralisation, simplification of procedures and various other measures as enumerated in the Exim Policy. Steps have also been taken to promote exports through multilateral and bilateral initiatives, identification of thurst sector and focus regions.

Industrial Growth Rate

4412. SHRI BRAHMAKUMAR BHATT : Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state :

(a) what was the rate of industrial growth during the last three years;

(b) whether industrial growth rate has declined during January to March, 2000 as compared to the corresponding period during previous year; and

(c) the steps taken to improve growth rate ?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) The rates of industrial growth during 1997-98, 1998-99 and 1999-2000 (April to February) are 6.6%, 4.0% and 7.9% respectively.

(b) The growth rates of industrial production in January and February 1999-2000 are higher than rates in the corresponding months last year.

(c) The Government have taken a number of measures like privatization, liberalization of foreign direct investment, de-licensing and reduction in rate of interest to attract private investment and to promote industrialisation.